



Jim Newberry, Mayor

LEXINGTON - FAYETTE URBAN COUNTY GOVERNMENT

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Mayor meets with Immigration Commission

Mayor Jim Newberry met with members of the Lexington-Fayette Commission on Immigration today to accept their final report and to thank members for their hard work.

“This issue is a difficult one for our community. Many citizens have strong, conflicting views on immigration and, at times, that has made this process very difficult for commission members,” Newberry said. “I thank them for their time and their patience.”

The final report, which was given to the Urban County Council today, lists seven recommendations. Newberry said after he has had time to study the report, he will work with Council to decide on the next steps.

However, even though Newberry has not thoroughly examined the report, he said he has serious concerns about proposals to issue local identification cards or driver’s licenses to residents, regardless of immigration status, and does not think those ideas will find much support in Lexington.

“Driver’s licenses are a state government function, not a local government function,” Newberry said. “As for issuing local identification cards, I question whether they would

have any positive impact and I feel certain that the process would be expensive. If a person is in this country legally, then they would have, or could obtain the identification they need. If they are here illegally, I don't think it is appropriate for government to issue them an ID card or a driver's license, and I question whether they would come in and ask for one, anyway. There is little evidence to support the notion that identification cards will address any of the problems associated with the breakdown of our country's immigration system."

The Mayor said he wants to explore implementing several of the recommendations.

Newberry said he supports the vigorous enforcement of housing codes, and will work with the Urban County Council to identify additional steps that may be taken to enhance those enforcement efforts.

The Commission's other recommendations will be evaluated in the coming weeks.

Those recommendations include establishment of an Office of International Affairs; Title VI compliance (ensuring that the city is meeting its obligations under the Civil Rights Act); enforcement of labor laws, although that is by in large a state issue; and identifying a role for the local criminal justice community to assist in the enforcement of federal immigration laws.

Newberry said while he opposes involving the city police in enforcement of federal immigration laws, there may be a role for corrections officers. "The state has also been considering various options, and we would be interested in discussing those options with state officials," the Mayor said.

However, Newberry said that federal law requires that the role of local and state government in enforcement of federal immigration laws be limited. "This is a federal issue and no matter what we do in Lexington or in Kentucky, it can only be addressed effectively at the federal level," he said.

Finally, Newberry called upon the community to remain tolerant and respectful of the viewpoints of others as immigration concerns are addressed. “This is a difficult issue for our community, but I am confident that we can work together to find solutions that will work for Lexington,” Newberry said.

Members of the commission were Chair, Glen Krebs, Attorney; Vice-Chair, James E. Keller, retired Supreme Court Justice; Barbara Connor, Civil Rights Compliance Officer, Fayette County Public Schools; Wendy Devier, community volunteer; Dr. Brian Rich, Transylvania University and Kentucky Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights ; Kay Dignan, Psychologist; Marilyn Daniel, Attorney and Director, Maxwell Street Legal Clinic; Ray Larson, Commonwealth Attorney; and William Wharton, Executive Director of the Lexington-Fayette Human Rights Commission.

In compiling the report, the commission heard from several members of the community, including presentations from police, Fayette County Schools, a demographer, an immigration attorney, the county attorney, spouse abuse experts, and local revenue officials. Two of the sessions were open for public comment. All commission meetings were open to the public.